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NEWS RELEASE



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THIRD DISTRICT COURT JUDGE ATTENDS CONFERENCE ON GENOME JUSTICE

Salt Lake City, Utah—Third District Court Judge Denise P. Lindberg attended a "Genome Justice," pilot program July 8 through 11 at the University of Washington School of Law in Seattle, Washington. The conference brought together state judges from throughout the country to discuss legal issues involved in genetic testing, especially as it may affect women and other vulnerable populations. The program, which is being developed by the National Association of Women Judges (NAWJ), aims to educate members of the judiciary about the developing science of genetic testing and its possible disparate effect on populations traditionally underserved by the justice system.

"The rapid development of genetic knowledge resulting from the mapping of the human genome is leading to the creation of new technologies that will affect us in ways we do not yet fully understand," said Judge Lindberg. "Judges need to learn how these technologies, from assisted reproductive technologies (ART) to gene therapy and cloning, will affect the legal rights of individuals."

According to Judge Lindberg, courts are struggling with how to balance employers' and insurers' interest in limiting their health care costs with employees' interests in being protected from potential misuses of genetic testing. Similarly, courts are being asked to decide how changing definitions of the family can affect the legal rights of the persons involved. Consider, for example, the possibility that a baby could have five different "parents"—an egg donor, a sperm donor, a surrogate who carries the child to term, and an infertile couple desperate to have children. Increasingly, courts will have to sort out the rights and responsibilities of each of those potential "parents" in relation to the child, and to each other.

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Utah Supreme Court Chief Justice Christine M. Durham is one of the NAWJ co-chairs responsible for developing the Genome Justice Program. A second pilot program will take place in Phoenix in April 2005, after which the program curriculum will be made available nationwide. Funding to attend the Genome Justice program was provided by the State Justice Institute (SJI) a nonprofit organization established by federal law to award grants to improve the quality of justice in state courts nationwide. Part of SJI's mission is to foster innovative, efficient solutions to common problems faced by all courts. For more information on the institute, go to www.statejustice.org.

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